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ABSTRACT

A British project examined the level of awareness of the Department of Continuing Education's adult program, Open Studies (OS), in Lancashire and South Cumbria. It assessed what the public and ethnic minority groups thought about accreditation of courses, which segments of the public would be interested in accredited courses, and what prices people were prepared to pay for courses. Six discussion groups were organized and 48 people attended; discussions also occurred with two ethnic community training officers. Findings indicated strong support for OS among those who knew about the program, but many were either unaware of the program or were unsure of what it provided. Generally, there was a lack of awareness about university adult education programs. The majority were not against credit, but some were strongly opposed. Most could state why credit might be valuable, but many reservations about the introduction of credit were expressed by those in favor and those opposed. Several market segments emerged: employed individuals with and without formal educational qualifications, mature students with work or family commitments who wanted further study, unemployed individuals, and older adults who enjoyed a challenge. Courses for minority ethnic groups needed to be culturally relevant. Strategic development options included the following: even coverage of programs, communication with potential students, value of courses, and flexibility. (Appendixes include focus group transcripts and supplementary data from OS database.) (YLB)

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ED 383 878

department of continuing education

Credit for All -

A Marketing Research Report into Credit-Bearing Courses

by Lucy Hunter, Janet Nelson, Jo Tait

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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LANCASTER UNIVERSITY

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This report presents the findings of a market research project carried out in May 1994 by the Department of Continuing Education at Lancaster University.

The first page of the report details outcomes of the report that the DCE has implemented or planned by March 1995.

CREDIT FOR ALL

Strategic development options that have been implemented

1 Even coverage of provision over geographical region

1.1 Departmental leaflet

A full colour leaflet has been produced that will be distributed throughout the region during the next year or so. This describes in easy to follow language the diverse opportunities we offer and we hope will generate enquiries and raise our profile.

1.2 Local public lectures

Lunchtime lectures traditionally offered only at Lancaster have always been very popular. We now run a series of lectures at Ambleside.

1.3 Local group contacts

An initiative is being developed by the marketing unit to visit community groups and set up courses for them. Only credit bearing courses will be offered. A colour desk top presentation unit is being prepared together with information packs for interested groups.

1.4 Distance learning options

Distance learning options continue to be developed and will be promoted to the above.

2 Communication with potential students

Local area representatives

These have been proposed as Associate Tutors and current discussion centres around whether they should be area or subject based. The first is in post - an associate science tutor responsible for a whole area. Outcomes will be monitored.

3 Other developments

3.1 Newsletter for industry planned for Autumn 1995, highlighting courses suitable for employees and development of bespoke courses.

3.2 Short term: the conversion of existing credit courses to Continuing Professional Development (CPD) accredited courses to enhance their promotability to industry.

Long term: development of suitable courses for CPD accreditation and promotion to businesses.

CPD accredited courses may be given a special section in the brochure, highlighted in the newsletter, and promoted via visits to businesses.

3.3 Marketing officer to visit CPD registered businesses to promote our CPD courses.

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1. Research Aims

1.1 To find out the level of awareness of the Department of Continuing Education (DCE) and its adult education programme, Open Studies (OS), in Lancashire and South Cumbria.

1.2 To find out what members of the public think about accreditation of courses, including part-time degrees.

1.3 To assess which segments of the public will be interested in accredited courses.

1.4 To find out what ethnic minority groups think about accredited courses, including part-time degrees.

1.5 To assess what prices people are prepared to pay for accredited and non-accredited courses.

2. Methodology

2.1 Researchers

This research was carried out by:

Lucy Hunter, Marketing Officer with the DCE. Lucy has a degree in Marketing and French and has worked in Continuing Education since 1990. Previously Lucy worked in direct sales and promotion for the RAC and as a free-lance market researcher.

Janet Nelson, Marketing Officer with the DCE. Janet has a degree in Spanish and holds an Institute of Marketing Diploma. Janet spent 15 years in marketing positions in industry, and prior to joining the DCE was a Group Product Manager for Lyons Bakeries. Janet has worked in Continuing Education since 1990.

Jo Tait, Programme Co-ordinator for the DCE's Open Studies programme. Jo has a degree in Independent Studies and her background is in adult and informal learning. Jo has worked for the DCE since 1994.

Other members of DCE staff involved in the research:

Julia Preece, Outreach Programme Co-ordinator
Darrell McGuire, Marketing Assistant
Katherine (Kath) Anderson, Staff Tutor, Creative Arts
June Watson, Development Officer

2.2 Promotion of the Discussion Groups

Invitations to participate in discussion groups were sent out with the Open Studies (OS) brochure in March. Further invitations and posters were sent out to recruit participants in the Preston, Lancaster and South Lakes areas. Networking and personal contacts were used, eg job centres, health visitors. Personal recruitment was attempted in Lancaster city centre.

2.3 Response to Promotion

The main response came from the Open Studies brochure. Using a selective approach, Open Studies students with a variety of backgrounds were invited to focus groups. Recruitment of non-participants was more difficult with a very limited response to leaflets and posters and no response to personal recruitment in Lancaster.

2.4 Organisation of Groups

Six discussion groups were organised throughout the region. The aim was to have between 6 - 10 people attending with one DCE representative leading the discussion and another taking notes. Attempts were made to make the surroundings as relaxing as possible and tea and biscuits were provided half way through each session.

Additionally,discussions took place with two ethnic community training officers and Julia Preece, Outreach worker for the DCE. The aim of these discussions was to gain an insight into the expectations and needs of ethnic groups in the region. A staff seminar was also held on 8 June to discuss the thoughts of members of DCE staff.

2. Methodology continued

2.4.1 Lancaster Group

21 April at the Storey Institute.
10 people attended, all previous Open Studies participants and enquirers.
DCE represented by Lucy, Jo T. and Darrell.

2.4.2 Blackpool Group

3 May at Blackpool Central Library.
9 people attended, all had knowledge of DCE, some with experience of OS courses.
DCE represented by Lucy and Janet.

2.4.3 Preston Group I

10 May at Janet's house, Broughton, Preston.
9 people attended, all had previously participated in OS courses.
DCE represented by Janet, Kath and Darrell.

2.4.4 Ambleside Group

23 May at Lakeland Campus, Ambleside
7 people attended, all very informed about Continuing Education, interested in lifelong learning, many already OS participants.
DCE represented by Jo T. and June.

2.4.5 Preston Group II

Held 24 May at Janet's house, Broughton, Preston.
7 people attended, no existing OS participants but all interested in adult education.
DCE represented by Janet and Jo T.

2.4.6 Barrow Group

Held 27 May at Barrow Central Library
6 people attended, mixture of participants in OS courses and non-participants. Varied expectations and experiences in adult education.
DCE represented by Jo T and Darrell.

2.5 Format of Discussions

It was decided that the same basic structure should be followed in each group although the emphasis on certain sections varied from group to group.

2.5.1 Introduction

General introductions were made. Any forms which needed completing were filled in at this stage and people generally chatted to one another for 10 minutes. The purpose of the afternoon was outlined.

2.5.2 Warm-up

A brief exercise in discussing learning experiences and word association was carried out during which ideas were gained as to what constituted learning in people's minds. Although the results were not relevant from a research point of view, the exercise helped the group focus on education.

2.5.3 University Adult Education

People were asked what they thought about this and what it should provide. They were also asked if and how they found out about our courses.

2.5.4 Changes in Funding of University Adult Education

Discussion took place as to how these could be introduced and adapted to their best effect. Also other forms of learning situations, eg. study groups.

2.5.5 Tea Break

The discussion seldom stopped during the break, such was the enthusiasm by this stage!

2.5.6 Credit-Bearing Courses

The subject of credit was introduced and the implications discussed together with their relevance in the field of adult continuing education.

2.5.7 Reasons to participate in Credit Courses

These were obtained either by asking people to form groups and decide on top 10 reasons to take a credit course or by involving the entire group and using a flip-chart for ideas. Some groups were also asked for reasons *not* to want to take courses for credit.

2.5.8 Assessment

The subject of assessment was introduced and ideas gained as to what form of assessment the groups regarded as threatening or non-threatening.

2.5.9 Course Fees

The cost and perceived value of courses was the subject of the final part of the research. Ideas were obtained mainly through a mock 'auction' of popular day courses.

2.5.10 Other Points or Comments

Each group was asked to express any comments or ideas they had about the DCE's provision, either in the light of the discussion or of past experience.

2. Methodology continued

2.5.11 End of Discussion

Most discussions lasted a good 3 hours, from 2 pm - 5 pm and generated an enthusiastic response. The DCE representatives thanked everyone for their time and agreed to send a summary of the findings.

The participants were equally grateful for the opportunity to express their views, they seemed to enjoy the experience and thanked us for our hospitality.

3. Findings

3.1 The profile of the Department of Continuing Education and Open Studies throughout Lancashire and South Cumbria

There is strong support for Open Studies among those who know about the programme, however many people are either unaware of the programme or are unsure of what it provides. Generally there is a lack of awareness about university adult education provision. Various issues were identified that relate to this lack of awareness about university adult education in Lancashire and South Cumbria:

3.1.1 Lancaster-centric programme

People felt that many areas are under-represented in Open Studies. There is strong support for Open Studies across the region and in all areas except Lancaster people wanted more courses at a variety of times. Other facilities connected with Open Studies would also be popular outside of Lancaster such as satellite Open Studies Association groups and Lunchtime Lectures.

Areas that were particularly mentioned for increased provision include: Blackpool, Leyland, Burnley, Chorley, Ulverston and small towns around Barrow (although not Barrow itself).

It was suggested that having a wider choice of courses close to home would encourage "uniphobes" to attend.

3.1.2 Support from groups

Various local groups were cited who could support and help publicise Open Studies in areas outside of Lancaster, e.g. U3A groups, Neighbourhood Watch schemes, WIs. local history societies. In many instances those suggesting these groups had a connection with them.

3.1.3 Sponsorship

Sponsorship from local large companies was suggested as a way of increasing the range of provision & reducing cost to the department.

3.1.4 Visible local presence

A stronger local presence was encouraged, including the facilities to give information and advice, and take enrolments. Open Studies was encouraged to be more visibly active in areas outside of Lancaster. See also Marketing, under section 3.2.14.

3.1.6 Lack of awareness

People who are not aware of Open Studies have no expectation that a university will provide adult education classes, especially classes that are open to all and are relevant to non-academics. These people would not approach the university to find out about adult education provision. Most people have come across Open Studies information "by accident" originally.

3.2 Views on credit courses

A number of often conflicting views were expressed relating to credit courses: The majority of the focus group participants were not against credit, however some people were strongly opposed to it. Most people could think of reasons why credit might be valuable, however, many reservations about the introduction of credit were expressed, both by those in favour and those opposed to credit.

3.2.1 Reasons to take a credit course

For many of those who took part in the sessions these were the same as their reasons for taking a non-credit course - content, tutor, location, cost, easy parking.

For some however characteristics particular to the credit nature of the course were prominent: improves job potential, increase self-esteem, put on your CV, proves interest in learning, sense of achievement, increased status. Recognition of achievement and feedback were mentioned but are not the most common reasons to take a credit course. Likewise, access to Higher Education and part of a part-time degree were mentioned but were not key concerns. People expect university courses to be "meatier", more academic and more interactive than courses offered by other providers. They want credit courses to offer something new - new subjects, new tutors, new ways to study and get credit.

Many people cited easy parking as a key consideration when thinking about taking a course. (This issue was also raised in previous research into Open Studies).

3.2.2 Reasons not to take a credit course

The main reasons not to take a credit course were dislike of assessment, increased commitment and cost (see next sections). A further reason not to take a credit course is that the atmosphere on courses might become less enjoyable.

3.2.3 Assessment

The majority of views expressed on assessment were negative and many people found the idea of assessment extremely off-putting. Some participants expressed more positive views of assessment. The acceptability of assessment for most people depended on its form. Many people equate assessment with examination, a word that conjures up negative associations.

Acceptable forms of assessment were discussed, and these included: verbal interview/discussion with tutor, group discussion (although there was some dislike of the notion of "trial by peers" and of a semi-formal presentation to peers), continuous assessment, choice of form of assessment, group project.

Those who did not find assessment threatening thought that it gives value to learning.

3.2.4 Commitment

It was commonly thought that credit courses would require a greater commitment in terms of time and effort on the part of participants. There was a range of opinion on how much time and commitment people are willing to give to a course. For most it would depend how valuable the course was in terms of relevance to them.

Many people felt that commitment was linked to value and credibility. For credit to be worth having a course needed to be substantial, therefore low commitment was not enough. For many people the increased commitment that credit courses require is what puts them off credit courses.

Many people felt that if they enrolled on a credit course they would have to attend every session to keep up with the course and be able to do the assessment. With non-credit courses they can miss a session without having to worry about the consequences.

It was suggested that people would be unwilling to enrol in advance for a credit course as it was something of an unknown quantity, plus they would be committed to attending all sessions and it would be difficult to drop out if other commitments arose.

3.2.5 Cost

Several people assumed that credit courses would mean increased costs both to the department and to the individual, as they would involve more administration and more communication between students and the Open Studies office. If this was so, it was felt that any extra benefits would be outweighed by the extra cost and that they are a waste of resources.

3. Findings continued

3.2.6 Tutors

A very high standard of tuition was expected from Open Studies lecturers and some people had complaints about the standard of tutoring on Open Studies courses. Others were very pleased with tutors on their courses.

The main area for complaint was failure to deliver material in a way that is accessible and appropriate for adults. Quality control procedures were questioned.

Some people felt that the introduction of credit would mean less time was spent on the course content and more time spent on matters relating to credit. The value of credit courses for people not taking the credit would be less.

3.2.7 Transfer of credit, portability

This was rarely a key concern but was seen as a useful characteristic of credit. National recognition of credit seemed important for the credibility of the scheme, and adds value to Open Studies credit.

Those familiar with GNVQs thought them to be more transportable because they are part of a national scheme and are generally better known. Also, GNVQs were thought to offer more relevant job-related skills.

3.2.8 Quality

Some people were concerned about the quality of credit courses. Their concerns focused on the acceptability and recognition of the value of Open Studies credit, together with concerns about mechanisms to ensure standard quality of teaching and assessment.

Some people's perception of quality relates to how hard the course is.

3.2.9 Access to learning resources

Some people were concerned about what support resources would be available to them if they were to take a credit course. This ranged from advice and guidance to access to a good library.

Knowing that you will have access to suitable resources is important for some people who are thinking about committing themselves to a credit course that will involve an assessment.

It was also suggested that support services offering guidance and reassurance for students would be useful.

3.2.10 Timing of courses

In all areas except Lancaster people wanted more courses, offered at a variety of times, weekdays and evenings as well as weekends.

Daytime seemed to be most suitable for retired people and unemployed people. Most other people preferred evenings or weekends.

Some people would prefer a mixture of times for their course e.g. mainly evenings but with some longer weekend sessions. Certificate courses with long mid-week day time sessions were said to be impossible for working people and people with children.

3.2.11 Other ways of learning and getting credit

Proposals for more choice in ways of learning and getting credit were well received. Most people encouraged flexibility in provision. The notion of assessing life experience and former learning experiences was very popular.

Some people mentioned pure research which they undertake individually. Support for people involved in research was encouraged together with the chance to receive credit for this work.

Study circles were discussed both as a solution to price increases and as a form of flexible learning. Many people were interested in study circles as an option although the logistical and social problems in setting them up were recognised. Also, the option of organising bespoke courses for established groups was popular. New technology and Distance Learning were mentioned as other learning methods.

Overall, the notion of having some control over the learning experience - what, when, where - appears attractive. Flexibility in course content was an attractive notion, people liked the idea of being able to influence the course content through negotiation with their tutor at the start of the course.

3.2.12 Level

Some people were confused over the level of credit courses. If they are university level how can they be open to everyone? What level are courses in the brochure? If they are university level how can they be beginners' courses? Some people assume that credit courses will be quite advanced and they are not sure if they will be able to follow the course.

3.2.13 Course participants

Some people assumed that there would be 18 - 21 year old students on credit courses. Some people talked about this positively, others found this idea off-putting. (Open Studies Association members have previously said that they like meeting younger people through courses and Open Studies events).

3.2.14 Marketing

The most significant finding regarding marketing is that people want us to present credit in a frank and "user-friendly" manner so that they can understand the full implications of the scheme. They also think that explaining the reasons behind changes in the programme would increase support for the new developments. They wish to be

treated with respect and as individuals who deserve to be kept informed. Open Studies promotional copy is urged not to be "woolly" or to "waffle". A "use it or lose it" approach was suggested.

In addition, it was suggested that assessment guidelines would be useful explaining what the assessment of each course involved. Some requested a clearer definition of credit value, and an explanation of the time-scales involved in accumulating worthwhile amounts of credit.

Marketing methods suggested include:

- getting involved more with groups to help set up and publicise courses
- seeking sponsorship
- an educational road show travelling round region
- talking to people who have taken credit courses
- piggy-backing bulletins from other organisations e.g. staff newsletters
- promoting credit courses via local industry training and staff development departments
- using existing contacts better
- getting out more in the community

3.3 Customer Profiles: Credit Market

Through the research several market segments emerged.

3.3.1 Aged under 45 yrs. In employment. May have A level or degree level education. Want job-related specific skills that are accredited. May wish to change career.

3.3.2 In employment. Few formal educational qualifications. Career may be held back after a certain point by lack of formal qualifications. Credit valuable for self-esteem, proof of ability to study at higher level, plus improves job potential.

- For both these groups commitments to job and family mean time and money are limited. Credit is only valuable if it is widely recognised, vocationally useful and of a high quality. Assessment is accepted as the means to obtain credit and gives the award credibility and value. Willing to pay going rate for courses. Timing of courses has to be at evenings or weekends.

  Courses have to be enjoyable too!

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3.3.3 Further study. Mature students with work or family commitments. Whether as access to further or higher education or indeed as part of a part-time degree, the key issue is that the credit is widely recognised and transferable or accepted by the home institution. Quality needs to be assured. Timing of courses must take account of other commitments. Availability of modules close to home is advantageous. Support services for materials, guidance and study skills are useful. Vocational link less important. Cost is often an issue.

3.3.4 Unemployed. Want to take courses that will be useful in job market. Courses need to be of value recognised by employers and job centre employees. Timing less crucial but cost important.

3.3.5 Self-esteem. Credit important to prove their capabilities. University level important. Credit must be widely recognised to be valuable. Importance of timing and cost varies. Vocational link less important.

3.3.6 Enjoyment of challenge. Older group. Credit signifies level and challenge. Week day mornings or afternoons acceptable. Some resistance to evenings. Vocational link not important.

3.4 Minority Ethnic Groups

3.4.1 Type of courses

Courses need to be relevant to culture of minority ethnic groups and this should be obvious in the title, e.g. Black History, Confidence Building for Asian Women, etc. Ethnic communities will assume that courses are not relevant unless there is an ethnic reference in the title.

Adult education does not exist in the cultures of many minority ethnic groups. Training is the only form of education that is familiar, therefore credit courses are more likely to be popular with minority ethnic groups than non-credit courses, especially if we can market them as having vocational relevance and credibility with employers. Courses must have skills that are relevant to the workplace. The question will always be, "where will it get me?" Young men and women in particular are looking for courses to give them a competitive edge in the job market.

Course ideas: anything to do with Black History, Culture, Music, Religion likely to succeed in Preston or East Lancs. Language courses also popular e.g. Gujurati, Urdu and Arabic.

There is also a case for offering OS level courses in minority ethnic languages such as Gujurati e.g. Religion and Music. It may be the case that once someone from a minority ethnic groups has experienced Open Studies level of course, he/she may wish to

expand on this and take another related subject, even if it is not taught in Gujurati (mainstreaming).

3.4.2 Key areas

Courses for minority ethnic groups could be offered in Preston Blackburn, Burnley, Nelson, Accrington, Lancaster.

3.4.3 Tutors

Courses more likely to recruit if it has a tutor with ethnic name. "Credible" tutors can be found via minority ethnic groups, or on campus where there are many overseas post-graduate students. Perhaps the Educational Advice and Guidance team deal with people who could make suitable tutors for minority ethnic groups? Overseas tutors are perceived to have more insight into the ethnic culture and therefore to be able to tutor the course in a more relevant way.

3.4.4 Pricing

Fees can be higher on courses for men. Women have less disposable income and payment of fees can be a problem. If course seen as being unique, worthwhile and valuable, people from minority ethnic groups are more likely to pay the going rate, although there is competition from other local providers offering courses free or at reduced rates.

3.4.5 Part-time degrees

There is some market for part-time degrees, although coming to Lancaster is a problem. If we could offer degree modules locally the uptake could be good among ethnic groups. Distance learning is one option, as is offering part-time degree modules via local colleges. Access courses may be useful in local area.

3.4.6 Marketing

At present with few courses being attractive to people in minority ethnic groups all we can do is to encourage black and asian participants via translated phrases in the brochure.
Courses will need to be set up via an Outreach approach, with prior contact between staff tutors and minority ethnic groups essential in order to set up courses that are credible, relevant and wanted. Staff tutors will have to go back to those groups to market them through ethnic community networks

3.5 Cost

The price threshold for a non-credit day course was tested and the indications were that the current price of around £12 is about the limit of the market. Price increases for day courses to over £20 would significantly

affect recruitment. Some people would pay between £12 and £20 if they felt the course was worth it. Even for a wonderful course offered for just one day by Open Studies, few people would pay over £30.
The perception of value of Open Studies courses in terms of cost is unrealistically low. Most people have little or no idea of the actual costs involved in putting on courses and the scale of the "behind the scenes" operation. Few people are aware that courses are subsidised.
Cost may not be as important as how you can pay - paying by credit card and spreading the cost by paying in instalments means more people can afford to come.

3.6 Other Issues

Other issues for serious consideration were raised during the focus sessions:

- Dissatisfaction with adult education provision and marketing from the Charlotte Mason College
- The amount of time it takes to get a refund on a cancelled OS course

3.7 Other Suggestions made during focus sessions

- Send focus group participants a summary of the research report
- Introduce a car share scheme
- Run training/awareness sessions for job centres and career advisers
- Sent out sheets detailing courses that are full or with low numbers
- Produce a part-time degree prospectus.
- Get out and about in the region - caravan, road show, train
- Free taster courses
- Include refreshments in course price for day courses
- Mini summer school at Barrow, subsidised by local industry and retail outlets

4. Strategic Development Options

These are not recommendations, but are presented as choices based on the data gathered, before the imposition of practical limitations. Obviously there are more options than those listed. Additions and comments on feasibility would be welcomed in responses to the report.

4.1 Even coverage of provision over geographical region

The stated mission of the Department of Continuing Education is to deliver University level education to an area between Leyland in the south, Grasmere and Ambleside in the north, Kirkby Lonsdale and Sedbergh in the west and to Barrow and the Fylde coast to the west.
It is unfortunate that our efforts seem to be invisible to a large majority of the population in this region This is certainly not due to a lack of effort on the part of the Department but suggests that there is much work still to be done. In some way, greater visibility of DCE in local areas needs to be achieved. Strategic options that emerge from the research include:-

4.1.1 Departmental leaflet

A clear statement defining the aims and purposes of the Department of Continuing Education could be produced in a durable, well-presented form that could, in the first instance, be distributed with the brochures, but would also be expected to have a longer life in traditional information outlets.

4.1.2 Local information and enrolment facilities

Enrolment, guidance and information facilities in centres of population throughout the region. Perhaps this could be achieved by means of a 'mobile shop'. Alternatively, co-operation with local libraries, colleges of FE and community and adult education centres could achieve similar ends, resources permitting.

4.1.3 Local Lunchtime Lectures and taster courses

The physical presence of the University to include lunchtime lectures and/or taster courses.

4.1.4 Staff tutor involvement at local level

Staff tutors to engage with these activities in order to evaluate local response and familiarise themselves with the availability and interest of tutors and students in particular subject areas.

4.1.5 Local group contacts

Once contact had been established, local networks or learning circles could develop, with DCE acting as agent for groups and tutors.

4.1.6 Distance learning options

Distance learning programmes could be established as an optional or integral part of this learning framework

4.1.7 Development of independent learning

Courses to develop skills in independent learning and the confidence to work on programmes of study based on students' own interests could result in a self-generating market for lifelong learning.

4.2 Communication with potential students

It is evident that brochures and leaflets are not the most efficient ways to reach the public. They are generally bombarded with written, visual and audio messages so that a natural process of selecting out irrelevant information is inevitable.
In order to communicate, personal contact must be established. To be successful, the Department needs to express its purposes clearly, establish any common interests with groups that are already in existence and individuals who have expressed some interest and then demonstrate willingness to listen and act according to the needs expressed.

4.2.1 Networking role for staff tutors

Staff tutor engagement in communication. (This is covered to some extent in 4.1.2 above.) Developing networks is a time-consuming and energy-intensive process, but could pay off in the long run.

4.2.2 Local area representatives

Local area representatives based in small areas such as Kirkby Lonsdale could be identified and used as contact people to find out what is needed and to publicise courses and opportunities. Status, influence on planning and future provision and perhaps discounts on courses could recompense them for the effort involved.
The enthusiasm of some of the focus group participants demonstrates that there is a ground base of skill and interest that has been an untapped and potentially invaluable resource.

4.2.3 Involvement with groups

Or group branches, perhaps similar to WEA groups, could provide the same facility to the department. In this instance, the onus would not be on one individual, but the organisation would be more complicated.

4.3 Value of Courses

Different client groups have differing perception of what constitutes value. Can these be integrated so that the way DCE presents its courses appears to fulfil many of the value criteria for many of the potential students and other clients? There is a danger that in trying to meet the expectations of <u>all</u> groups, we manage to confuse many and fulfil none.
The relationship between cost of courses and perceived value was addressed by the research, but the results were not conclusive. Any findings on this

issue are further complicated by cultural expectations, as is evidenced in section 3.4, on ethnic minority groups.

Furthermore, an older generation of traditional liberal adult education students has the expectation that education should be freely available to all; in contrast, those who have grown up during the past 10-15 years, as well as employers and advisers, may make decisions about value based upon how much is contributed to the process by the student and upon the practical outcomes in terms of skills and future prospects.

4.3.1 Using credit for vocational and further study purposes

The research identifies a section of the population for whom vocational needs and access to more formal areas of higher education are especially relevant - these people are particularly noticeable among those contacted through the OCNW research (see Appendix 6.4). For this group, transfer of credit into employment and other learning environments is the indicator of value. The process of negotiating value in this wider sense may take some time and considerable cultural shift (see Robertson, D Choosing to Change, HEFC, 1994)

4.3.2 Improved perceived value

One way to improve the perceived value of the courses offered by DCE is to integrate elements of self-esteem and confidence building into each programme, so that successful completion results in individual students having the skill to communicate and even negotiate the value of the learning they have accomplished.

4.3.3 Benefit oriented promotional messages

Clearly stating the expected outcomes of a course also increases the positive perception of its value, whether this is in terms of skills or knowledge or a combination of these. When they are transferable to other fields, this should be expressed. This could be particularly important in communicating with clients other than individual students, for example Job Centre or Careers advisers and employers who might be persuaded to subsidise their employees if transferable outcomes are evident.

4.3.4 Recording achievement

If the Department were to use a transcript system of recording credit based on Recording Achievement in terms of learning outcomes, students, prospective and current employers and other institutions would be able to identify what areas of knowledge have been covered and what skills attained. The level will be perceived according to the reputation of our institution and the quality assurance mechanisms we are known to maintain.

4.3.5 Credit challenge increases self-esteem

Self esteem is seen by some students as a valuable end in itself. These students require that the level of difficulty is both challenging and within their reach and that there is a good support system in place. For many in this group, accessibility in terms of time and location are an indicator of their own personal value and this in itself can provide evidence of the value of the course to them. There is a considerable sense of achievement simply in participating actively in a university level course.

One way to communicate self-worth to a mature student is to ensure that the input he/she makes is recognised and valued; this could be achieved by students being supported in contributing to the planning of courses, rather than expecting them to consume whatever is offered.

4.3.4 Quality courses for highly educated

The **learning challenge** is given as a motivation for a different group of learners. They are likely to be more mature, and possibly even have quite advanced qualifications in a different field. For them, the value is present as much in the process of learning as in the outcome, so that the emphasis would be placed on the quality of the tuition and the originality of the content and/or presentation.

4.3.5 Accreditation of Prior (Experiential) Learning for self-esteem

APL is a further way to develop the self-esteem of a learner. The process of reflecting on past learning in order to provide evidence of learning at HE level has been shown to be both challenging in a personal present-time sense and fruitful in assessment of ensuing learning. Such a learning opportunity could have relevance to all identified groups of learners.

4.3.6 Research changes for non-credit courses

Students who resist the idea of credit altogether we might refer to, internally, as the **learning for pleasure** group, although this has implications that learning for credit is not enjoyable. This group will need to be aware that the cost of their courses will not, in future, be susbsidised. In this case, the value, regardless of cost, needs to be apparent. This points to very careful research into viability and interest, before the course is advertised.

4.3.7 Which market niche is OS best placed to serve?

As pointed out in the introduction to this section, there is a danger of approaching the public with too many offers at the same time. Strategically, we need to consider which approaches are likely to be most effective in terms of response and in terms of income as well as which areas we would be able to deliver most readily in the short term.

4.3.8 Quality equals value

Demonstrating the quality assurance mechanisms we have in place at all points of contact ensures that the intrinsic value of courses is evident.

Lancaster University benefits from a reputation for the high level of its research output. It is also accepted in the local area that it is considerably more difficult to gain access to a full time place at Lancaster than, for instance, the University of Central Lancashire, at Preston.

Clients have a right to expect that these same high standards will extend to its extra-mural provision, although there is some apparent discrepancy in the fact that we have no minimum entrance qualification to Open Studies courses.

This may need to be addressed by our guidance procedures and marketing output providing clearer statements as to the actual level of our provision.

Might it be that our courses are not always appropriate for all, and that appropriate guidance, (which might include redirecting potential students to other institutions) while not immediately rewarding to the Department, will actually increase our reputation for integrity.

4.4 Types of Courses

As can be surmised from the above analysis, there is a need for very flexible provision, in order to cater for a range of needs and it is essential that this flexibility is communicated appropriately. The tension between offering a diverse and flexible programme and being able to fill courses and describe options clearly needs to be addressed at all levels.

4.4.1 Credit courses as part of undergraduate provision heirarchy

One way to express the credit bearing programme that we are already authorised to provide is in a hierarchy of undergraduate-level provision, based on the proposed two year Associate Degree, into which all other credit bearing provision could articulate.

Open Studies certificate
120 points general credit

Named certificate courses
120 points specific credit

Associate Degree
240 points

Any completed Certificate course could form Part One of the Associate Degree, subject to approval (based on evidence of the coherence of the total content of the certificate) by the Faculty / Departmental Board of Examiners. Presumably this would have to be done on the basis of each individual student's scheme of study.

4.4.2 Visual presentation of credit "jigsaw"

In order to present this structure to the general public, a visual image (for example building bricks and a house) might be helpful. Should we consider employing the services of an illustrator/designer for this important communication task?

4.4.3 Core modules

Modules that could form part of the core of any undergraduate certificate could include:

- an independent learning module,
- a thinking skills module,
- a module to assist in developing and presenting a portfolio as evidence of prior learning or to demonstrate that some part of the learning undertaken as part of the certificate is of the accepted standard,
- a project-based module covering research skills and others as needed. These could be taught in area centres and possibly by combination of distance learning and group work. Would they be credit-bearing? American experience (see Mandell,A. and Michelson, E. Portfolio Development & Adult Learning: Purposes and Strategies) suggests that small amounts of credit are appropriate and that the benefit to students far outweighs the actual credit transfer value.

4.4.5 Part two of Associate Degree

Consideration needs to be given to the Part Two section of the Associate Degree. Many students and tutors of the OCNW were enthused by the Independent Study model, subject to qualified support and clear structures being in place.

4.4.6 New courses and higher level assessment for advanced students

The group of students who were identified (3.3.1) as already qualified may prefer to take a post-experience / post-qualification certificate of some sort. Possibly some of the same modules could be assessed at a different level on higher level criteria. Alternatively, new courses could be developed, possibly based largely on distance learning and learning circles, since we could presume (subject to interview and qualifications) that many of the skills needed would already be in place.

4.4.7 Stage C for OCNW students

Students who currently study for OCNW qualifications or might consider doing so in the future (see Appendix 6.6) have expressed interest in certification at the equivalent of what we might internally call *Stage C* level. These modules could be taught at FE colleges by tutors who already teach Stage B, in similar subject areas, building into the Certificate and Associate Degree structures we have already mentioned above.

4.4.8 Soft outreach to combat price rises/credit

Those who resist the whole idea of credit courses need to be aware that their courses will be self-funding. In order for them to be seen to be viable in advance, the soft outreach principle of responding to requests from groups already established would seem to be most appropriate. Even these groups could be won around to credit, if it were demonstrated to be enjoyable and rewarding.

Appendix 1

Notes on Focus Discussion Group
held at the Storey Institute, Lancaster
21 April 1994

The group was asked which school experience they remembered as a child/teenager.
The response was:

Receiving the cane at junior school	
Kindness and friendship	
Boarding school	
Headmaster and teachers	3
Gave me moral fibre	
Learnt respect for elders	
Life was easier as a child	5
What I learnt as a child has now gone due to change in the learning system (eg - different curriculum)	

What learning experience had the group had as adults, inside or outside educational establishments??

Learning how to cope with wife/children	
Tolerance, patience and understanding	2
Intolerance	
Involved with making things (crafts etc)	
Personal development with work	
Kindness/helpfulness	
First job is very significant in one's personal development	
Chance to reflect on what teachers said when at school. Able to implement this as an adult.	
Educated through adult evening classes	

Do you remember any good/bad learning experiences?

(a)	As a child:	learnt because we had to. No choice.	3
		grim	
		too disciplined	4
		exam-orientated	2
		smaller classes	
		kind teachers	
(b)	As an adult:	great experience. Learnt because we wanted to	6
		tutors helpful, friendly, experienced	4
		treated as adults, good atmosphere	2
		helped to develop my potential	
		tutors explain better and are more interested	
		exciting to learn as an adult. More mature.	
		experience has been dependent on tutor	10

Regarding university adult education:

Expectations:

- expected other students to be very intelligent. Relieved when I got there! 2
- welcoming, good atmosphere, encouragement, professionalism 2
- expected to be embarrassed due to age difference
- expected it to be a closed institution

Perceptions of University adult education now:

- good resources available to the public, eg: library, lectures
- disappointed not to be able to implement own original ideas
- more mature students there than expected. Pleasant surprise.
- bewildered! Size of campus confusing.
- learning new things - found university method of learning difficult
- would recommend it!
- wonderful exchange programme at Lancaster
- able to develop full potential
- friendship/support
- specific needs were met 2

Adult education experiences in working life

- distance learning very good 2
- tutors lacked practical skills
- Open College interesting, provides good introduction to Higher Education
- Open College should link in with university 3

The issue of credit-bearing courses was introduced. People were asked what they thought:

depends on type of assessment 3
recognise that it is a good idea in theory 3

In which ways would it be acceptable?

- assessment depends on subject (sometimes may be difficult to find time to do homework)
- OK if one is prepared to give commitment and has a measure of skill
- assessment in the form of interview with tutor or a tape-recording 5
- would be happy to do an exam 3
- learning experiences to go towards assessment 2
- different types of assessment might be best
- give value on the process of learning - good idea
- would need option not to take the credit 2
- if resources available it would be OK. Would need to use university library 3
- libraries generally would have to be more organised 2

Can you think of any good reasons to do credit?

1. Subject matter and course content
2. Stimulates mind
3. Cost of course can be high. May as well have something in return.
4. Academic challenge
5. Recognition
6. Feedback
7. Opens up new horizons

Likewise, can you think of reasons not to do credit?

1. No added value to course
2. Length of course - a big commitment
3. Cost factor. Assessment must incur more money.
4. Actual syllabus
5. Assessment

How much would you expect to pay for a 'Learning for Pleasure' day course with a famous tutor?

- £12 (all agreed that this would be an acceptable price)
- £20 (all agreed this would be acceptable if it were a very special course)
- £30 (only 8 agreed to this)
- £40 (only 3 agreed)

If the course just had a normal tutor:

£12 (all agreed this would be acceptable)
£20 (only 3 agreed)

The credit-bearing courses system was explained to the group, including the fact that non-credit courses would not be supplemented and would therefore be increased in price. How did they think this should be explained?

- We should tell the truth about government funding
- Be honest about how much each course costs us to put on
- Give them a choice - credit and cheaper course, no credit - more expensive
- Emphasise all the benefits of the range of credit courses
- Give discounts to people who do more than one course
- Invent an easy-payment system
- Allow use of credit cards

FOCUS GROUP TWO
BLACKPOOL 3RD MAY 1994

The second focus group was held from 2pm- 4.30pm on Tuesday 3rd May 1994 at Blackpool Central Library. Nine people attended. The Department of Continuing Education was represented by Lucy and Janet, Lucy conducting the meeting and Janet taking notes.

Lucy pointed out that the information given would be totally confidential and that no names would be mentioned in any subsequent action.

Lucy asked the participants to write down their own experiences of learning since leaving formal education, whether practical or personal skills, positive or negative. They were asked to write the first three things which came into their heads:

Parenting		Secretarial	2
Driving		IT	2
Counselling		Managing a Home	2
Handicrafts/embroidery	2	U3A(organising/participating)	2
People skills		Economics	
Childcare		Fork lift driving	
Monetary skills		Lorry driving	
Personal growth		Tolerance	
Painting		Adaptability	
Geology		Patience	
Adult literacy (teaching)		Creative writing	

There was therefore a wide range of things which people considered to be 'learning'.

Lucy asked for any negative learning experiences which people remembered:

- Cost-cutting of courses
- Courses curtailed or cancelled
- Rehabilitation centre in Preston
- Expense

Lucy explained that universities provide a range of different types of courses, both non-vocational and vocational. The group were asked what sorts of courses they thought universities provided to the adult population.

Many of the participants had seen Open Studies brochures either because their existing interest in adult education had caused them to seek it out or because OS had been recommended by friends. Their thoughts on this subject were therefore influenced by prior knowledge.
The new ACE newspaper which is now published by Lancashire County Council was thought to be an excellent source of information and had made many of the participants wiser about adult education courses in the Lancashire area.
One member of the group had been participating in university courses for over 40 years.
Before seeing brochure or hearing about it from friends, most of the group had not expected a university to have an adult education programme.

Lucy asked how the group thought university courses compared to local college courses

More interesting. Like to learn about the latest developments in the fields of research etc. Concerns raised about the standard of university lecturer. Some very poor in terms of delivery and finding the right level. There should be an empathy between lecturer and students. Healing with Herbs was cited as an excellent course. Quality control should be implemented at course organisation stage. Evaluation forms should not be necessary.

Lucy outlined the work of the Dept. of Continuing Education and asked the group what they would like from us.

Excellence in tuition
Good communication
More courses in Leyland
More evening courses
More day-time courses
Shorter courses with less prior commitment
Lunchtime lectures more widespread
More weekend courses
Follow-up Women's Health course in Preston
More flexibility in course - tutor discuss with group what they want out of it before starting

Lucy asked if a recognition of achievement would be welcome after completion of course

Yes	5	
No	2	
Depends	2	if a vocational course, then yes; if non-vocational, no.

Is there any point in gaining a certificate for a course taken for pleasure

Most of the group said 'no, save money on administration and spend it on the tuition.

Ignoring cost, is there any value in having a certificate?

A few people thought that personal satisfaction and a boost to morale were valid reasons for having a certificate, if there were no additional costs involved to department.

Lucy outlined the government changes and the shape of things to come. Most people flinched so she went on to ask why they were against assessment.

Against	**For**
Assessment would put people off	Self-esteem
Commitment to homework	Good for CV even if it were non-vocational
Commitment to completion of course to get credit	Shows broader outlook
Time commitment	Proof of interest in learning
More admin. costs to university and country	
Fears of extra cost to student (eg postage)	
Intimidation	
Energy	
Range of courses would suffer	
It judges you - waste of learning time	
Pleasure of learning would go	
Exams very off-putting	

Against (cont'd)

Waste of resources
People would be unwilling to enrol in advance so courses would be cancelled
Less fun
More competitive
Self-doubt
Defeats the object of going on a course
Don't want to be tested at my age
We want to hear about the most recent advances but why test us to see if we've taken it all in?

Lucy asked people to select the top three reasons for going on a credit course. The group was divided into four teams for this and each were given some suggestions, though they were invited to add their own idea.

1. Increases self-esteem
   Improves job potential/Helps you re-direct your life
   Demonstration of commitment both to study and to go further

2. Cost
   Good tutor
   Location close to home

3. Good tutor
   Subject matter & course content
   Good parking facilities

4. Good tutor
   Improves job potential
   Good parking
   Subject matter

(See appendix for summary of ratings of reasons to take a course for credit)

Lucy explained in more detail how credit courses will work, eg: no exams, cheaper than courses for pleasure, assessment may be in a variety of ways and they will be weekly and probably day/weekend too. She then went on to ask what form of assessment people would find acceptable.

- discussion with tutor at end of course
- presentation to group - though most people thought this would be threatening and some thought that the rest of the group would not be interested.
- continuous assessment

Thinking of your most ideal day course and ideal tutor (eg Pavarotti doing a dayschool on opera), how much would you pay?

£12 everyone would pay this, though two said they'd think twice!
£20 most people
£30 50:50
£40 no, definitely not

How much would you expect to pay for an ordinary day course run close to your home, assuming that the lecturer had been tried and tested and the location was good?

£5 everyone
£10 everyone
£15 no-one would pay this.

The perceived value of courses is therefore very low. The group were shocked when they were told that they only paid 20% of the true cost of the course. This raised comments such as inefficiency, too much bureaucracy etc.

Changes seem to be inevitable although we don't yet know in which direction things will go. How should we announce these changes in our brochures etc?

- Tell the truth
- Get them to join U3A!
- If it were explained properly, more people would support credit scheme
- Cut out gobbledy gook
- Don't try to pull the wool over their eyes
- Write some editorial for the Lancs County Council ACE publication
- Circulate groups via Neighbourhood Watch Schemes who have tendency to infiltrate all sorts of knowledge to neighbours

Does knowing the rationale behind the changes make you more likely to support the credit programme? General assent given (grudgingly!)

What different types of learning can you suggest, other than formal classes? eg - study circles

Local history groups	Sponsorship via local firms, eg BNFL	*
WI	Links with University of Central Lancs	*

The meeting ended at this point. Everyone said they had enjoyed it and found it stimulating and useful. It was generally agreed that a younger age group would probably be more receptive to the credit issue.

Other points raised during the meeting:

- Lytham Assembly Rooms too stuffy when blackouts being used. One participant wouldn't go there again.
- Our administration was criticised - one man had to wait 2 months for a refund, one lady had to ask for an information sheet.

*	BNFL contacts:	Carmel Hall, Information Officer, BNFL, Springfields. Derek Pine, Welfare Officer, BNFL, Springfields (Sheila Williams said to mention that she referred us to them)
*	UOCL contact (U3A)	Jim Salisbury, Continuing Education Co-ordinator

SUMMARY OF RATINGS
REASONS TO TAKE A COURSE FOR CREDIT

1.	Good tutor	32
2.	Good parking facilities	25
3.	Subject matter/course content	21
4.	Improves job potential	16
5.	Receiving credit increases self-esteem	15
6.	Cost	14
7.	Stimulates the mind	12
8.	Pleasant learning environment	12
9.	Location - close to home	11
10.	Improves job potential	9
11.	Credit give concrete and tangible award	8
12.	Self-enhancement	7
13.	Part of a part-time degree course	6
14.	Increase general knowledge	6
15.	Feedback on work & level of understanding	6
16.	Increase general knowledge	5
17.	Social aspects	3
18.	Demonstration of commitment to study and potential to go further	2
19.	Meeting people of similar mind	2
20.	Could help to redirect ones life	1
21.	Circumstances or age can nullify all aspects	1 (?)

NOTES FROM PRESTON GROUP DISCUSSION
Broughton - 10th May 2.00 pm - 5.00 pm

There were nine participants (two had to back out because of illness). Lancaster University was represented by Janet (leading the session), Kath and Darrell who took notes.

Janet asked the group to write down what sprang to mind when given certain cues:

1. *Learning experiences*
   'Every kind of experience is a learning experience'
   'You learn less as you get older
   'I only regard learning as formal classroom situation' (3)
   'Private study'
   'Something stimulating and challenging'
   'New knowledge or skills'
   'Word processing' - but why can't we be shown how to do it instead of being expected to know? (3)

2. *Tutor*
   Helper Rapport Interesting Usually potty!
   Usually need training in communications
   Don't need to control adults - some are very patronising
   Need to motivate students otherwise they drop out of course
   Need to communicate at the right level and exercise discipline to the class (4)

3. *Courses*
   Academic Structure Guided study
   Give technical information (2)
   Something with a tutor

4. *Assessment*
   Pass or fail (2)
   Negative (2)
   Someone writing down comments
   Progress towards a goal
   Guidance

Janet then asked what people thought of when presented with the term "University Adult Education"

(Everyone had experienced some form of learning within a university adult education department.)

- Radio classics (distance learning)
- Tutor over-the-top
- Open up resources of the university to the public. Not a substitute for local colleges.
- There is a difference between LEA courses and University ones - University ones usually non-vocational and should stay that way
- University courses are academic
- Specialised courses which are available to everyone
- There is a psychological barrier in the word 'university' = brainy undergraduates
- University courses supposed to be throughout county - why not in Chorley?
- Word 'university' carries status
- University adult courses good - but people scared of time commitment
- Lack of confidence to take long courses - we may get ill, or even die before it finishes!
- Study should be fun (4)
- Should use more post-grad. students as tutors

What would you like to see us provide from the Dept. of Continuing Education?

- More courses in Burnley and more advertising about courses nearby
- More courses in Leyland and Chorley (Liverpool putting on courses in Chorley now)
- More vocational courses (3)
- More non-vocational courses
- Credit-bearing courses for younger people especially - but at times when they can do them, ie - evenings/weekends
- More specific information about course - eg - on IT courses, state software programme to be used

The government now wants us to promote credit-bearing courses. (Kath outlined proposal).Reactions?

These were mainly positive:

- I'd welcome credit (2)
- Recognition welcome
- Assessment would be worthless to me. No value.
- Good for younger people (3)
- Optional credits
- Assessment would be OK if essay-related or providing portfolio of course material (4)
- Wouldn't mind submitting work (3)
- Group discussion would be a good method of assessment (2)
- Flexible system would be OK - choose which courses you want for credits (4)
- Student choice - credit or non-credit (3)
- Feedback would be useful for tutors
- Would be of value for linked courses (theory and practice), eg Local History
- Would there be a negative effect on the tutor?
- Peer group assessment would not be acceptable (4)
- If government want us to do credits we'll humour them by doing them (2)
- Credits not really necessary
- Portability between institutes would be good if standards consistently high (3)

Reasons for taking a credit course - top ten reasons from 3 groups of 3 people:

Group One
Subject matter
Tutor
Increased general knowledge
Cost
Social aspects
Stimulates the mind
Self-enhancement
Pleasant learning environment
Location close to home
Part of access to HE course

Group Two
Subject matter
Tutor
Stimulates mind
Cost
Location
Social aspects
Feedback on work
Receiving credit would increase self-esteem
Part of a part-time degree
Increased general knowledge

Group Three
Cost
Credits
Increased general knowledge
Subject matter
Improved job potential
Stimulates mind
Receive credits for self-esteem
Location near to home
Good tutor

From your point of view, how can we encourage people to take an interest in credit-bearing courses?

Everyone said that we should be truthful and explain about government changes.

- Tell them about recognition of achievement (4)
- Warn them about the time-scale involved
- Put on more courses at weekends
- Go for more distance learning courses
- The less you say about credit the better
- Tell them what the credit equates to in terms of university level
- Warn them about assessment without frightening them
- Set assessment guidelines - explain what each course assessment involves
- Define the value of the credit - eg, 'A' level standard etc
- Define what constitutes a credit (3)
- People might worry about their performance in comparison to other students
- Explain framework of credit structure
- National recognition important (2)
- Joint courses with WEA included? (2)
- Credits might make people worry about level of course

What sort of cost would you be prepared to pay for:

(a) Your ideal course (eg - Pavarotti on Opera)

8 people would be prepared to pay up to £40 maximum
1 person would not pay more than £10
1 person would not pay as much as £10

(b) A normal Open Studies day course

No-one was prepared to pay more than £12

General comments were sought at the end of the session

1. Use LAWTEC more. They have a huge amount of funding.
2. State in brochure "If you don't use it, you'll lose it"
3. Ask people at the end of the course what they would like to do next. Captive audience. Use it.
4. Can OSA members get discounts off computer software and hardware at the Computer Centre?
5. Introduce a car-share scheme
6. Advertise the benefits of the courses to students
7. Provide more information bases
8. Customised courses for existing groups

Notes on Focus Discussion Group
held atAmbleside
23 May 1994

Participants were asked to tell the group something about themselves and their interests

- Retired teachers 3
- Interested in computers, to a greater or lesser extent 4
- Teach computing
- Writer and researcher on land contamination
- Music
- Walking
- Open University student 2
- Like to dabble in courses, try out new subjects
- Languages
- Travel
- Needlecraft
- Special needs tutor, mainly dyslexia
- Non-standard subjects, definitely not flower-arranging
- Flexible learning centre at Lancaster & Morecambe College
- Antiques
- Lake District studies course
- Hotelier
- Unemployed person pursuing her own studies

The group was then asked to respond with the first word which came into their mind. Word Association:

Learning Experience

Classrooms	Something to fill the void	Blackboards
Stimulating	More difficult as you get older	On-going
Relevant	Something to get your teeth into	Fills the gap in retirement
Not shallow	Not burdensome	

Tutor

Lecturers	Someone who really knows his subject
Clear-spoken	Fosters correct student-tutor relationship
Not too worthy	Flexible approach and adapts the teaching to students
Good communicator	Ability to impart knowledge
Structured approach	High expectations of tutor

Courses

Essays	Study with a purpose
Where?	Temporary advice centre in Ambleside
Sociability	Educational guidance
Homework	Technical colleges
Like-minded people	

Assessment

Examinations	Can be frightening	Associated with judgment
Personal	Competition	Success versus failure
Encouragement	Don't like the word - bad experiences	

The group was asked where they obtained their information on courses at the moment

Lancaster & Morecambe College leaflets distributed around Ambleside
Ambleside library
Advertisements and editorial in Westmorland Gazette
Careers office
U3A
Mailing lists

It was suggested that learning groups be set up where the university provided the tutor and the location

The U3A is setting up a similar venture. Learning circles for 1-2 sessions.

The concept of informal work, leading to a certificate was put to the group

- Interested in learning in general but not in a qualification
- The majority of people who want qualifications will have signed up for an appropriate course
- The qualifications needs to be worthwhile
- Wouldn't want to do any work for a course which is just one afternoon a week but happy to do amount of work required for an OU course

The nature of credit-bearing courses was explained to the group

- Someone can do a course and learn how to appreciate art, but how would it be assessed?
- A 10 week course is easier for a slow-starter to cope with
- What about 'falling off'? The course depends on people attending every week. Credit-bearing could be an impracticable element
- Will the assessment encourage or discourage people?
- Credit-bearing courses run by a university could have a negative image

How about distance learning or residential courses?

- Social life could be lacking

The group was asked whether they expected something different from a university course as opposed to a course from another provider

Meatier content
More academic
More expected of the students rather than passive involvement
Homework
Unnecessary hurdle of putting pen to paper
Problem of level from which to start. This could fade out.

A discussion about late starters and people who did not have the confidence to consider such courses ensued. It was explained that this aspect was catered for in the Outreach Programme, Open College of the North-West etc.

Selling points for credit-bearing courses

A.	For older adults	B.	For younger adults
	fun/enjoyment/interest		late starters
	comparatively low cost, good value		change of career, job progression
	retain mental agility		transferability
	short-term interests satisfied		fun/enjoyment
	less threatening than Open University		less theatening than OU

In summary, the group felt that the older age group would take such courses for enjoyment and interest and the credit-bearing nature was not important. They thought that a younger person could be more motivated by employment or vocation.

The group was asked to suggest ways in which assessment could be sold as non-threatening

- Interview students, give guidance and reassurance
- Educational guidance roadshow travelling around the area

The group was asked how much they would expect to pay for a top-rate day course taught by an expert, eg - Pavarotti on Italian Opera

- the most accomplished person is not necessarily a good teacher
- not keen, too many people would attend
- £10 - £15 per person maximum. Remember it has to be doubled for a couple.
- top quality teaching most important
- lower numbers better for communication

Other points made .....

- Timing of courses - seasons should be taken into account. Nobody in Lakes wants to be indoors on spring/summer evenings
- Why don't we run sessions for Job Centre trainers or Careers Advisers? They seem to have a very blinkered outlook and don't realise that following a course for interest might encourage unemployed people to pursue education or training, or give them the confidence they may need to try new things.
- Very pleased that the university is putting on courses at Lake District campus.
- Some participants had received a sheet giving details of courses which were full or had low numbers and they thought this was a very useful piece of information.
- There was strong evidence for a very aggressive marketing policy by Lancaster & Morecambe College in the South Cumbria area. The publicity had been received through doors and one participants knew of transport which is laid on from Kendal to Lancaster to enable students to attend both interviews and courses.

Summary

This was a very interested group, keen to be consulted. The discussion was lively and constructive as should be expected with so many who had previously been involved in education. One participant said it was the most stimulating discussion she had had for a long time. Some swapped addresses. U3A recruitment took place! We suggested an Open Studies Association splinter group as the benefits of membership were mainly Lancaster-based and they were not prepared to travel.

Notes from Preston (b) Group Discussion
Broughton - 24th May, 2.00pm - 5.00pm

There were seven participants. Lancaster University was represented by Janet, leading the session and Jo who took notes, and participated / interfered .

Janet asked the group to write down what sprang to mind when given certain cues:

1. **Learning experiences**
   'Independence'
   'Knowledge'
   'Enjoyable'
   'Time available'
   'Company'
   'Negotiated competitiveness'

2. **Tutor**
   Someone to check that you're on the right track
   How formal - his capability / ability?
   Art /Science distinction - I would expect different things - art not so clear cut and science more didactic.
   Must communicate at the right level
   Could be unskilled and have ability - might be better at understanding problems if this were the case.

3. **Courses**
   (British Aerospace)- past technical qualifications
   Pastime - fun
   Opportunities - vocational
   Choice
   Freedom
   Work
   Credit (not always)

4. **Assessment**
   exam
   leading to vocational
   got to be assessed - motivation - ('no two ways about it') - to prove value
   People take it seriously if there's assessment
   Academic qualifications can be for pleasure - rather do that than the washing up!

Janet asked whether personal skills count as learning - the whole group seemed to nod and one person added that communication was important

Janet asked what people thought of as 'University Adult Education' and were the group aware of our provision.

Knew that we provided something but not sure what
One person said that her husband is in the second year of an Open University course - (demonstrating confusion!)
Two people had seen a stand at the Preston Guild
One person had done a course at University and was on the mailing list.

Janet asked what group would <u>expect</u> of U A E

"Much more than it's giving"
One person who had been a 'community learner' (associate student) said that he wanted credit and a grant for the work he had done - "What I did had no value". He would like to do a whole degree in this way and his comments on this theme will be found throughout the summary.
Broader courses

More support - means to get credits.
It's wonderful to start from scratch in the library.
One person's experience of a diploma course was that it was mainly retired people.
One vocationally oriented man made an impassioned plea - "Why bother with retired people!" (We're over the hill anyway).

What would you like us to provide?
No single formula - different categories - The group were theoretically concerned about socially excluded / poor population *(We described Outreach).*
The problem is that traditional subjects are inapplicable and obsolete - more inter-disciplinary courses - exciting and new areas to cover - a need for new courses in a new wrapping.
Need to be taught by NEW people - the traditional subject teachers can't teach new things (response to experience with UCL, Preston)
Awareness of Managerialism - that skills and diplomas are taking over as currency
Clarity about Level - is it abstract, detailed, in depth, reaching specialism and does it have relevance?
Clear guidance as to what course to choose - what is the purpose of the course and what qualification can it lead to.

What is the image of Continuing Education?
Don't know enough about educational structure to say.
Tremendous to integrate University to community - (Associated student). A chance to keep to yourself and integrate with 18 year olds.
Group responded that not enough people know about us - a fear of University unless you've been through the system.
One person didn't want us to publicise it too much, in case it became swamped!
We provided inside knowledge once someone had been on a course, their confidence was increased and they realised they had a right to be on campus.
The job of the Department is to tell people what their entitlement is.
One person couldn't understand what so many of us (45) spend our time doing, particularly as none of us has a lecturing brief.

General reasons for taking (credit-bearing) courses?
Enjoyment (4)
Interest (not to achieve something)
To prove a point - that I can do it (Women's Studies)
Incentives are more complex than that - more than fun
Self esteem - power in the world
Status by doing and having done accreditation

Janet: Do you want a certificate?
yes (3) no (1)
Yes, if they already have a degree
A sense of achievement
I don't want only bits of paper
regular companionship (3) - (retired people change friendships).
structure and purpose
becoming/remaining involved in life - wanting to do this with the students who are already at University
A certificate may not be transportable but it has intrinsic value - there were questions about the real value and the real transferability of credit.

Reservations about credit-bearing?
One articulate man felt the whole idea was abhorrent and represented the 'compliance culture'. His argument concerned the non-transportable nature of Quality and a fear about bureaucracy and assessment leading to measurement by the right/wrong answer.

One participant - a careers officer - compared liberal adult education with employment initiated NVQs. Felt the former was more transferable. Reference was made to former times when 'if you were keen enough to want to get on in a job, you went to night school.'

Reasons for taking a credit-bearing course?

We tried to encourage participants to list these from their own point of view only, rather than trying to take the view of some young potential student. The first run through (first figure), they had to choose only three reasons from a list of possible reasons supplied by themselves and previous groups. On the second run-through (second column), they were allowed to vote as many times as they wanted.

self esteem	4	7
location close to home		1
career	2	3
tutor	3	4
subject matter	6	7
cost	5	5
social aspects	1	5
tangible reward		4
shows a degree of commitment		4
resources and facilities		3
pleasant learning environment		4
access by pub. transport		1
parking		
filling time		2
improve mind		3
new learning experience		2
working towards a degree	1	4
improve ability		
for interest	1	4

Other comments arising from this process were
i) locally provided courses are better for people with a fear of the University environment,
ii) 'if people are interested, it could be in a garden shed'
iii) style of delivery is also important

Assessment.

What the University wants to measure is the ability to think and the process of learning. Not the same as O and A levels. Could be group projects, essays, report, discussion with tutor, learning based on experience and considered reflection upon experience. Background reading and homework will be essential.

Peer assessment - someone else to look at work?
Continuous assessment - coursework
Exam - one person felt an exam was the only worthwhile assessment
Group project - based on subject that all were interested in - and adult approach and could still include an element of pass/fail. Must have interesting subjects packaged and marketed well, to lead to individual suspending own needs in favour of those of the group.
Individual presentation - would be fair but requires extrovert personality (some would prefer an exam to this ordeal.

Perceived Quality involves hard work and then the status has value
Question: what is the transfer value of thsi credit?

What methods of learning ?

Study circles - involve
commitment - getting a group together
finding a time
having a lead figure for it to work
what are the financial implications re numbers?

would you want people you don't know in your own home?
hard to set up but it might just happen

Pure research - independent study - synopsis>tutor>library>end product
student needs skills and structure,
support, contact and advice

Timing of courses

Long courses on single subject areas are more valid -- <u>at least</u> 10 weeks to be worth doing
Weekends and a few evenings might be easier than traditional format.
Want better timing e.g. Cert in Comm Ed is impossible if you have children
(When <u>is</u> it best?) -

i) A person in a full time job employed by LCC replied that the County won't pay or give time off for e.g. counselling skills course, even though it is relevant, because their attention is on NVQs which they design for their own purposes - how transferable are these NVQs?? Evening courses are second best, but possible. This person appreciated the idea of some day/weekend elements, interspersed with short periods of weekend work - others nodded.
ii) tea time is impossible
iii) evenings not a problem

(You can't please all the people all the time!)

Day courses and costs

£12 was considered realistic and acceptable
£20 was maximum they would pay
Might pay extra if it involved a field trip
£80 - 'no way!'
Cost may not be as important as method of payment - need more flexibility (eg Preston)

Suggestions for Publicity

Need more publicity
Suggest careers departments and established colleges
Would like a purpose-produced part-time degree prospectus
What about a marketing caravan?
Make it clear that we are offering something NEW (and make sure that it is new!)

Additional notes

One member of the group was very enthusiastic about organising study circles - the subjects he thought would be attractive were Psychology, Linguistics, English Literature, History and Economics. Perhaps deserves future contact, when a clear policy is developed.
All the group would like a copy of the results of this work - a summary of the report to <u>all</u> participants might be a positive gesture and might even result in further involvement at no cost to ourselves.

Notes on Focus Discussion Group
held at Barrow Central Library
27 May 1994

The participants were asked to write down their own experiences of learning since leaving formal education, whether practical or personal skills, positive or negative. They were asked to write the first thing which came into their heads relating to adult learning, tutor, courses and assessment

Learning as Adults

Goals	Achievement	Pen	Chatter	Book
Group	Study	Aim	Priorities	Creativity
Surrounds	Scope	Motivation	Clarity	Work-experience
Life (4)	Commitments	Challenging	Problem solving	

Tutor

Good tutor	Not always in tune	Not organised
Quality tutor	Repetitive	Need to be abreast of new technology
Appropriate level	Need to develop	Level/progression
Poor tutor	Quality control	Adults there by choice (6)
Stimulating	Challenging	Inspirational
Flexible	Structured classes	Need to develop the students
Moral tutors	Supportive	Caring/empathy/sensitivity
Approachable	Enthusiasm	Imaginative

Courses

Not always designed for mature student	
Exclusively courses for mature students	4
Timing, collaboration	2
Delivery of courses	
Study circles	4
Technology, training for users	4
Flexibility & commitment to students	2
Guidance/choice of course	
Shift-system, accommodating them	
Distance learning	
Vocational	
Check what other courses are running	4

Assessment

Good idea	3
Oral exam	3
Practical exam	2
Via computers by monitoring	
Exams	2
Project	3
Course work	2
A-level standard	2

The group was asked how they found out about courses in their area
Library
Free papers
Supplements
Furness College

Recent government changes were outlined and the shape of things to come in relation to credit-bearing courses. The group's response was sought
Credit is basically a good idea. Would be willing to take some form of exam or assessment providing that quality control was in place and the qualification was recognised and valued.

When asked what they would be willing to pay for their ideal course, the answers were:
£20-£30 (3 people)
£10-£15 (4 people)

The group was amazed to hear that they only paid 20% of the true cost of the course. They agreed that we should be up-front and tell the truth regarding the changes.

How could we sell our 'university level' courses to you?

Selling Points
Reputable tutor
Subject
Exciting/fun
New/stimulating
Challenging
Access
Timing
Atmosphere
Cost
Low-wage rates
Useful/recognised qualifications
Facilities/resources
Information/advice/guidance
Travelling
Size of group

In order of importance
1. Subject/tutor/new/stimulating
2. Cost/useful/recognised qualification
3. Access/transport/setting
4. Size of group/information/advice

The group was asked to suggest ways in which Lancaster University could improve service to them

More courses in Barrow area	(6)	More courses in Ulverston	(2)
Flexibility	(2)	Timing of courses	(2)
Accessible		Good communication	
Lunchtime lectures	(5)	Free courses as tasters	(3)
Value for money	(4)	Tea/coffee/lunch included	(3)

Courses on history, marine, Furness Abbey, Music

Other points raised during the meeting
The group said there was a wide market in the Barrow area with a high percentage of unemployment. They suggested that we use Bay Radio and Furness Radio to publicise ourselves. Use a promotion bus to advertise ourselves more widely Ask unemployed people to carry out research for us. Set up groups. Set up practical courses. Run a summer school in the area as at Lancaster. Ask Asda/Tesco for funding/sponsorship.

APPENDIX 2.

PROFILE COMPARISON

Credit students and enquirers vs non-credit students

Sample Details

Credit enquirers: 62 respondents to Certificate leaflet distributed via public outlets such as libraries and via door-to-door distribution. Statistics compiled in May 1994.

Credit students: 28 current participants of credit courses for whom details are available. Statistics compiled in May 1994.

Non-credit students: 339 student records for Open Studies courses. Statistics compiled in March 1994.

Report includes:

- **Age**
- **Occupation**
- **Credit courses requested**

AGE

Comparison of ages of credit students and enquirers vs non-credit students

	Credit enquirers (certificate leaflet)	Credit students	Non-credit students
Under 18	0%	0%	1%
19 - 29	27%	18%	12%
30 - 39	27%	41%	16%
40 - 49	17%	18%	21%
50 - 59	14%	9%	18%
over 60	15%	14%	22%

This table does not include people who did not reveal their age.

Comments:

For non-credit courses around 61% are over 40 yrs and around 39% are under 40 yrs. For credit enquirers 54% are under 40 yrs and for credit courses 59% are under 40 years. This indicates that a larger percentage of younger people are interested in credit courses than older people.

OCCUPATION

Comparison of occupations of credit students and enquirers vs non-credit students

	Credit enquirers (certificate leaflet)	Credit students	Non-credit students
Professional	24%	67%	43% includes some retired professionals who stated their former profession
Semi/non professional	31%	11%	7%
Retired	22%	6%	21% does not include some retired professionals listed under Professional
Unemployed	9%	0%	15%
Student	6%	17%	12%
Houseperson	9%	0%	2%

This table does not include people who did not reveal their occupation.

CREDIT COURSES REQUESTED

People enquiring about credit courses

All! Various! Anything!
Art X 4, Art Appreciation, Art History
Astrology/Cosmology/Astronomy X 3
Biology
Botany X 4
Community Education X 5
Computing X 2
Cooking
Counselling
Creative Writing X 11
Dance X 4
Deaf Issues X 2
Dyslexia X 2
Education
English X 4 (GCSE X 1)
French X 2
Geology X 2
Health Studies X 2
History X 2
Human Biology X 3
Kendal course
Law and Order/Criminology X 4
Learn From Home X 3
Literature X 4
Man and Landscape in the Lake District X 2
Media Studies
Music X 4
Natural History
Needlework
Nursing
Painting X 2 (+ Landscape Painting X 3 + Portrait Painting)
Philosophy X 7
Psychology X 4
Religious Studies X 3
Russia X 2
Social and Industrial History
Social Studies/Sociology X 4
Study Skills
Teacher Training - primary, piano, voice
Theatre
Thought Processes
TV and Drama Introduction X 3
TV Journalism
Understanding the Writer
Women's Studies

These requests are likely to have been influenced by the courses offered in the credit course leaflet.

APPENDIX 3

19.6.94
FE Colleges (OCNW) and Continuing Education

The outcome of conversations with eight FE (OCNW) tutors and administrators and a total of five groups of students just completeing stage B units.

Note: questions covered included Independent Study issues, because, for the most part, the School of IS paid my expenses. (Report submitted separately to IS 2000 project). The outcome may be slightly skewed, therefore, but this may not be a negative influence.
My questions to FE staff and students related to perception of University and what they wanted from Lancaster in particular. Also related to how they saw future learning opportunities after completion of B units.

Students

- mixed feelings about IS but saw the opportunity for development, if there was good support
- status of Lancaster as an institution perceived as much higher than UCL
- interest in taking studies further, for those who weren't going on to University anyway
- barriers to attending Lancaster for degree studies - travel and timing
- students showed markedly less anxiety than marketing focus groups about assessment,- though some had resistance to exams. Some positive reactions to course work as part of the learning
- option of progression from completed B units studied welcomed
- questions regarding transfer value of certificates - particularly university access and vocational relevance

Staff

- Comparisons with UCL initiatives inevitable and favourable comparison of Lancaster standards and management of relationships
- Welcome easier access (geographical etc) for students although
- one tutor warned not to make access to degree level studies too easy - taking a degree can mean enormous life changes for the student - need for quality guidance.
- Wigan is developing guidance and APL systems to support staff and students - lecturers apparently feel relieved at sharing the burden of student selection and progression with a full time guidance person. (Also lecturers at Wigan taking RSA certificate in educational guidance - to increase skills and awareness).
- perceived need for more information immediately on Lancaster part time degrees generally, wherever they are being run.
- what will be the transfer value of our certificates, within Lancaster (direct entry to year two?!), with other institutions and vocationally?
- comments about unwillingness of Lancaster to admit non-standard students or OCNW stage B graduates (particular mention of business and management schools)
- two year associate degree, introduced as a germ of an idea, welcomed enthusiastically

- *stage C* option seen as appropriate for some students especially
  i)those who are already qualified but looking for a change in direction or a challenge *(relevant to marketing*) and
  ii) those completing stage B but unable to move on to degree at university for practical reasons
- stage C easily deliverable by tutors already in post
- suggest follow-up from short modules could be GNVQ (3 week process?) delivered and claimed as FTE by FE college
- otherwise value to FE college perceived as financial in a peripheral way (from room rental to demonstrable progression for funding purposes)

Outcomes

- further discussion and negotiation welcome - friendly relations developed
- a 'feel' for the political and personal field in FE
- one college (Nelson and Colne) is co-operating in finding space for one OS module (Women and Health) within the FE college, negotiating rent at the same price as OU and looking into advertising the module in their brochure for the autumn. **Jo to Action-** send copy

Suggestions

- initial negotiations to take place at teaching level, with tutors, to ensure co-operation of staff and appropriateness of provision
- collaboration between FE / OCNW colleges will result in cohesive package that can be delivered around the region
- development - consider how this applies to **non** 0CNW areas - can a programme be transferred to study groups / learning from home and still reach the same standard?
- Independent study skills need to be identified, supported with learning framework and marketed in and out of FE - Certificate in Indpendent Learning ? Connect with APL and GNVQ.
- can we use the negative experience of FE / UCL: interaction to implement positive,collaborative relationships for course design, paperwork, quality control and finances
- FE teachers -preferably part time for political and morale reasons - who have been involved with LINCS are the ideal delivery people for HE work

Questions and possible problems

- danger of treading on UCL/LINCS toes - better to offer something different from degree options initially? - but then what do we say about the transfer value? Needs negotiating at high level to avoid political faux pas.
- Maintain awareness of limitations of FE connections -
  i) not always well perceived by public and
  ii) not always in a position to offer provision in other geographical areas

Jo Tait
19th June 1994
oxnwfe

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